

Jacque Lamer Langlois went to see Tightrope team
Sunday 14th October and saw only 40 persons present his
comment was The English do not support their Theatre--
It is difficult to imagine ~~English~~ English speaking
Blacks not being present in large numbers to see

Robert Gonyea

" Our Soul on Ice" By Clarence S Bayne

*"I would like to begin my
discussion with this in mind."*

Black Community leaders have a moral obligation to adopt a more systematic approach to problem solving in the Black community. There must be infinitely more emphasis put on inter-organizational collaboration as oppose to inter-personal one-upmanship. We have to begin to define the Black community in terms of the stability of the institutions we create and sustain rather by the personalities to which we pin the labels of leadership. The lives of individuals are too short to encompass the span of time essential to creating a community out of the ravages of slavery and persisting mistrust. It is only through the construction of a net-work of dynamic social and economic structures with a protocol and a code of ethics that avoids the disasters imposed by personal needs that a viable Black community can be assured a place in Canadian society.

There is a body of opinion that considers the proliferation of organizations in the Black Community as sad commentary on the fragmentation that is often cited as the cause of its powerlessness. In my view it is not the proliferation of organizations that is causing this fragmentation. Rather it is the absence of any clear set of ideas of what the community is and should be within the framework of Canadian society. None of the major organizations in the Black Community are studying the implications of Meech- Lake for the Black Community and fewer yet are even trying to understand what the Free-trade hurrah is all about and how it will affect the lives of our

children. There is little evidence of a clear understanding of the forces that shape Canadian society that can be gleaned from the collective activities and strategies of the vast majority of Black community organizations. What one finds is a senseless duplication of services and imitation of each other's activities. Too many organizations in the Black Community are carbon copies of each other with the result that only a narrow set of needs are catered to. Almost every Association holds at least two or three dances a year. When you add this to the twelve dances a year held by the fifteen DJs in the community that adds another 180 dances a year to the approximately 100 held by various associations and the Carnival Committees and the nightly dancing and dominoes held at the Caribbean Social and Cultural Organization and the Jamaica Association. That's another 600 evenings of Reggae and Calypso. Then there are the dinners that are now beginning to look like they were all designed by the same social convenor. There are at least twenty of these a year, and of course we have our big jump up in the streets in June. Don't get me wrong I too jump up in the streets and rather enjoy the sense of collective celebration and commonality in the exhibition of shared traditions. But don't you get the strange feeling that we are not in evidence at other major happenings of social and cultural importance to us as a people. The Alvin Hailey Dance Troupe comes to Place des Arts and I hear say that only five Blacks were in evidence. Belafonte and Bill Cosby bring a few out but not the numbers that say we are approximately 100 000 in Quebec. For such a size community there has got to be more to life in Canada than dances in school, church and association halls.

Why should any leader feel any real satisfaction in addressing an annual meeting and having little more to say than "the Association had four successful dances this year, two more than the previous administration," while the organisation took no action to address or to support the actions of other organisations in their struggle to improve the quality of education for our children, or to raise our art and culture to a position of respect in the Country. Why would such a claim to fame be seen as acceptable while the membership dance and drink beer leaving whites to picket Stores (in association with two or three Blacks) in support of the Black struggle in South Africa. Why ! Is it not part of their wider responsibility to help mobilise their membership to assist or seen to be actively involved in such causes. The lack of any sense of collective action and net-working among the various groups have at times led to the absurd. For example when the Black Theatre Workshop decided to present Athol Fugard's "Statement" as a gesture of protest against apartheid in South Africa a group of Gaveyites refused to take an Advertisement from BTW or to review the production in their paper. It mattered not that several South Africans closely associated with the ANC came to see the show and thanked BTW for the gesture and commended the organisation on the highly informative OXFAM anti-apartheid photographic exhibit displayed in the lobby of the theatre. Isn't it sad that organisations and personalities are so hungry for the fame of being identified with specific causes that they sabotage each other, and do everything to frustrate each other's efforts to legitimately serve one community of people. Have you ever noticed how casual and sloppy the Master of Ceremonies is when he or she makes announcements about the events or the work of other Black organisations. This reflects a fundamental

inability of the structures they represent to use an occasion to serve wider social, political, economic, and cultural purposes. For them the Gala or the dinner is all that is important. I think that we must remind ourselves that "Swing low sweet chariot" was more than just a song. The slaves didn't sing that song because they liked singing. It was on many occasions the morse code to freedom. We have to begin to insist that these dinners and galas must also serve a community purpose not just that of the organisation giving the dinner or gala.

Why does every Black organisation in town want to deal with immigration and immigrant integration problems. Clearly our purpose could be better served if the larger structures like BCCQ and NCC act as the principal advocacy agencies and the various island and other out-reach organisations become the reference agencies. This would certainly say to every one that we are serious and organised. Every where we go in the community we hear the common complaint that our youth are growing up without a sense of who they are; without a sense of their culture and certainly without an understanding of the experiences that shaped our present and threaten our future. We have in our community two organisations that with organised support could go a long way to solving some of these problems. The BTW and the Quebec Board of Educators.

Two years ago an organised attempt was made to destroy the Quebec Board of Black Educators. As a result the Black community lost \$60 000 in subsidies for the remedial educational programmes that QBBE ran every summer. That organisation refused to die and today it has bounced back to its former strength where it now provides summer remedial

programmes and accredited secondary courses to 300 students. This programme is now almost self-financing. BTW is highly regarded in the City as a professional theatre company and the best artistic interpreter of Black culture and literature. The Downtowner in a review of BTW's production of Walter Borden's "Tightrope Time" said that, "The Black Theatre Workshop has made significant contributions to Montreal's theatre life since 1970. Important Black artists have been showcased. They deserve your support." Why are these community organisations talking about the crisis of cultural identity with our youth when BTW offers three shows a year to which they can expose Black youth. Why do they not include in their schedule of activities an evening at the theatre at one or two of BTW's productions. Granted this requires some selling and preparation, but this is a part of the job of the programme director. Do you know that most Black youth graduate from High School and never see a Black play and may in fact have never gone to the theatre. Why are the Community youth programmes not organizing to reduce the negative effects of these deficiencies by utilising the excellent opportunities offered by the work of the BTW. This is the kind of specialisation and rationalisation of resources and skills that has to be explicitly included in the short term and long term strategies of community organisations involved in social and cultural programming. But to do this we must rise above ourselves and rethink the role of the organisations we build and or are members of.

Most Black organisations operate as isolated cocoons of self actualisation and aggrandisement. Most of these structures exist to meet the needs of their membership with very little concern for the broader issues affecting the community as a whole. It is this tendency for

workers and members to become ghettoised into their organisations that has retarded the growth towards a more fully developed community, with a significant small business sector, well developed credit institutions, effective library service, a major cultural center that serves the needs of the community as a whole, a theatre space, etc. There is no organization in the Black community which exists solely to help other organisations solve problems. It is true that there are major structures which provide limited services to their member organisations, but none that do so without an affiliation requirement. Rivalry and a "mercantilist" view of the world characterise the nature of the relationship between many organisations. On one hand they seem to think that if they speak well of the programmes of other organisations that this will diminish their own status. On the other hand they seem to be of the conviction that there is a fixed pot of gold (funds) for the Black community and the only way they will get any is if they destroy some or all of the other Black organisations.

Because of the imitative rivalry that characterises the behaviour of subgroups that make up a loose form of community the benefits of specialisation are not realised. Networking on major issues becomes a very difficult process, though demonstratively not impossible. Thus, what is community consensus becomes difficult to determine in situations where the issue is important enough to spark controversy and assign social importance to the spokesmen. Although in recent times the major organisations have been able to hammer out a consensus on several issues, rivalries around access to Government funding and the protective strategies of several organisations have produced less than a united front. Many Government institutions have been quick to exploit

these weaknesses. The typical rationale given for refusal to grant concessions of a significant nature to Black community structures is that "we don't know who speaks for the Black community." It is only to be hoped that the Conference of the "Forum of Black Organisations and Individuals " scheduled to take place November 14 will create mechanisms that will at least allow consensus to develop around important issues relating to the welfare of the community as a whole and speed up the maturing process.